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The article recounts biographical information concerning Adelaide Crapsey (1878-1914), a little-known American poetess. It includes poems illustrating the cinquain, a stanza form she invented which is popular with children. (RD)

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LEE BENNETT HOPKINS

From "Trudeau's Garden"

Sadness
Is many things. . . .
Like when the bee can't find
The flower bed, no matter where
He looks![1]

This is a cinquain! The form was originated by Adelaide Crapsey! But just *what* are *cinquains,* and *who* is *Adelaide Crapsey*?

Cinquain is a delicately, compressed five-line, unrhyming stanza, containing twenty-two syllables broken into a 2-4-6-8-2 pattern. I first came to know this verse form while visiting a fourth-grade teacher in the East Paterson, New Jersey school system. Mrs. Frances Weissman had just included examples of her student's writing in her class newspaper, and the results were astounding.

Several months after that, an article by Jennie T. Dearmin appeared in *Grade Teacher* magazine,[2] and part of an article entitled "Improving Written Composition" by Dr. Mildred L. Wittick, Professor of English at Paterson State College, Wayne, New Jersey was devoted to the cinquain.[3] I became quite interested in the creative results that were obtained from children when they were taught this form. Immediate outbursts of cinquains came forth from students in both city and suburban areas where I tried and tested this form.

A suburban child wrote:

The leaves,
They fall so fast
When October comes round.
Leaves! Falling so fast! Could this be
Life? Death?

A city child in a culturally disadvantaged neighborhood created:

Christmas
Is a great day . . .
With happiness and joy,
With praying and remembering . . .
And Christ!

But teachers, administrators, colleagues, and friends continued to ask, "Who is Adelaide Crapsey? What more do you know about her?"

This led me to a treasure hunt of research on this American poet whom I found to be very obscure and very unknown in contemporary times. Adelaide Crapsey, the third of nine children, was born on September 9, 1878 in Brooklyn Heights, Brooklyn, New York to Adelaide Trowbridge Crapsey and Reverend Algernon Sidney Crapsey, an Episcopalian clergyman, and prolific writer. Adelaide's early childhood was spent in Rochester, New York where her father held the position as rector at Saint Andrew's Church.

From 1893-1897 Adelaide studied at Kemper Hall in Kenosha, Wisconsin. Upon leaving Kemper, she attended Vassar College where she shared a room with Jean Webster, niece of Mark Twain. Adelaide graduated from Vassar in 1901 and returned

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[1] Written by a fifth-grade boy in Fair Lawn, New Jersey.

[2] Jennie T. Dearmin, "Teaching Your Children to Paint Pictures With Words," *Grade Teacher,* 82 (March, 1965), 26-27.

[3] Mildred L. Wittick, "Improving Written Composition," *National Elementary Principal,* 45 (November, 1965), 14-18.

Mr. Hopkins is Senior Consultant in the Educational Resources Center, Bank Street College of Education, New York City.

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to Kemper Hall to teach. In 1905, she went to Rome to study archeology. She remained in Italy for a one-year period, and returned to teach at Miss Low's Preparatory School for Girls in Stamford, Connecticut, (which is now the Low-Heywood School, a college preparatory school for girls in grades six through twelve).

It was during this period that Adelaide was first stricken with tuberculosis. She voyaged to Holland with her father to recuperate, and it was here she planned *A Study in English Metrics*[4] of which only part one, a study of the relation of monosyllabic and polysyllabic words, was ever published. In 1911, with health somewhat better, Adelaide returned to the States, and became an instructor of poetics at Smith College in Northampton, Massachusetts. Two years later, however, she resigned her teaching position due to poor health.

The following year, 1913-1914, a year of failing health was spent in a sanatorium in Saranac, New York. It was here where she wrote and perfected cinquains. She had a room which faced an old, sadly abandoned graveyard. Adelaide termed this plot of land "Trudeau's Garden," wittily named after Edward Livingston Trudeau, an American physician who pioneered open-air treatment for tuberculosis at Saranac. This view, plus her prolonged illness, probably inspired her to write verses, both cinquain and poetic forms, about death. One of the longest poems she had written was titled "To the Dead in My Graveyard Underneath My Window." This poem was published in 1915, a year after her death, in a slender, grey collection of her work simply titled *Verse*.[5]

Thus,

Pain ebbs
And like cool balm,
An opiate weariness
Settles on eyelids, on relaxed
Pale wrists.[6]

Her death brought several epitaphs. Carl Bragdon in a Preface to the 1938 edition of *Verse* wrote of Miss Crapsey

> I remember her as fair and fragile, in action swift, in repose still; so quick and silent in her movements that she seemed never to enter a room but to appear there, and on the stroke of some invisible clock to vanish as she had come.[7]

Carl Sandburg, in a chapter entitled "Persons Half-Known," from his 1918 volume *Cornhuskers*[8] dedicated this poem to

Adelaide Crapsey

Among the bumble-bees in red-top hay, a freckled field
of brown-eyed Susans dripping yellow leaves in July,
I read your heart in a book.

And your mouth of blue pansy—I know somewhere I have seen it rain-shattered.

And I have seen a woman with her head flung between her naked knees, and her head held there listening to the sea, the great naked sea shouldering a load of salt.

And the blue pansy mouth sang to the sea:

Mother of God, I'm so little a thing,
Let me sing longer
Only a little longer

And the sea remembered its salt in long, gray combers howling new shapes on the beach sand.

There have been other tributes too, but few! The greatest epitaphs come today from

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[4]Published posthumously in 1918.
[5]Adelaide Crapsey, *Verse*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1938.
[6]*Ibid.*, p. 132.
[7]*Ibid.*, in Preface.
[8]Carl Sandburg, *Cornhuskers*. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1918. By permission of the publisher. Copyright 1946 by Carl Sandburg. Reproduced by permission of Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc.

TRUDEAU—*Continued from page 614*

the children—the hundreds of them who are being introduced to cinquains and who love the simplicity and the lyricism that they convey.

One sixth-grade child in a culturally disadvantaged area came near to weeping at Adelaide Crapsey's verse called "Triad" . . .

These be . . .
Three silent things
The falling snow, the hour
Before the dawn, the mouth of one
Just dead.[9]

and wrote her own "Triad" . . .

These be . . .
Three noisy things
The falling rain, the house
Before the night, the mouth of one
Just born.

And Jean Webster wrote in 1915, "It is through her creative work that she will be remembered. . . ."[10]

But has she been remembered? Taking from the library and reading the slim volume of Adelaide Crapsey's *Verse,* which seems as "frail and fragile" as she must have been in life, caused me to think that perhaps more of us should appreciate the great contribution that this woman made to American letters, and perhaps germinate among our children, the seeds that came from Trudeau's Garden.

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[9]Crapsey, *op. cit.*, p. 33.

[10]Jean Webster, *Vassar Miscellany,* (March, 1915).